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ABORIGINAL REMAINS IN THE MIDDLE CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY OF ALABAMA AND GEORGIA¹

By P. A. BRANNON

IN Lee and Russell counties, Alabama, and in Harris, Muscogee, and Chattahoochee counties, Georgia, are to be found many sites of aboriginal occupancy. The sites in the several counties named that have been investigated by the writer since he commenced to make occasional trips thereto in 1905 are the following: The mound and cemetery at the mouth of Wacoochee (Soap) creek, and the village site two miles below, in Lee county; the mound and cemetery at Abercrombie's Landing, in Russell county; the mound and cemetery at Kyle's Bend, and the flint quarry two miles above Columbus, Georgia, in Muscogee county; the two mounds and probable village site on the Woolfolk plantation, in Chattahoochee county; and the village sites in Harris county (see map).

The mounds, with the exception of the one at the Kyle site, are domiciliary. The Kyle site is a burial mound surrounded by a cemetery of later burials.

This locality was the home of the Lower Creek Indians, and several of their larger settlements, including their last chief town, were situated at or near several of the sites to be described. Some of the burials (with the notable exception of those of the Wacoochee mound), as shown by the accompanying glass beads and brass rings, indicate that the occupants came in contact with early European visitors.

Judging by the objects taken from the several sites, examined by the writer, it is believed that, although the territory covered is confined within a radius of thirty miles, the aboriginal occupants were of different tribes, and did not have a common locality for obtain-

¹ Presented at a meeting of the Alabama Anthropological Society, held in Montgomery, August 5, 1909.

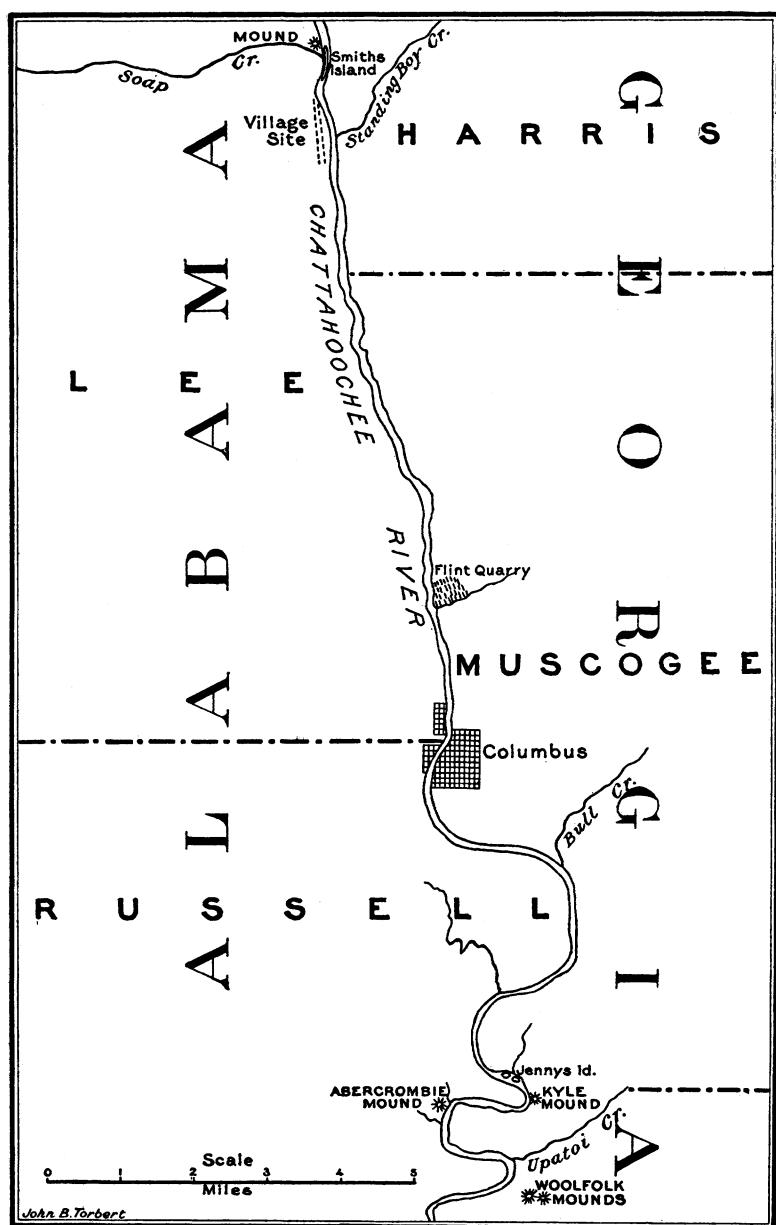


FIG. 36.—Map of a part of Chattahoochee river, showing location of mounds.

ing the materials of which their implements and ornaments are made; indeed, to one familiar with the archeology of this section, the objects from the various sites are clearly distinguishable one from another.

The source of the material from which the stone objects from the lower river sites were made has not yet been determined, but at the upper sites the inhabitants had only to go to the bed of the stream a few yards away.

THE WACOCHEE OR SOAP CREEK SITE

About five hundred yards above the mouth of Wacoochee creek, and between that stream and Chattahoochee river, are the remains of a mound about 50 feet in diameter and 2 or 3 feet high. To the north and east, and nearer the river, is a cemetery. The mound

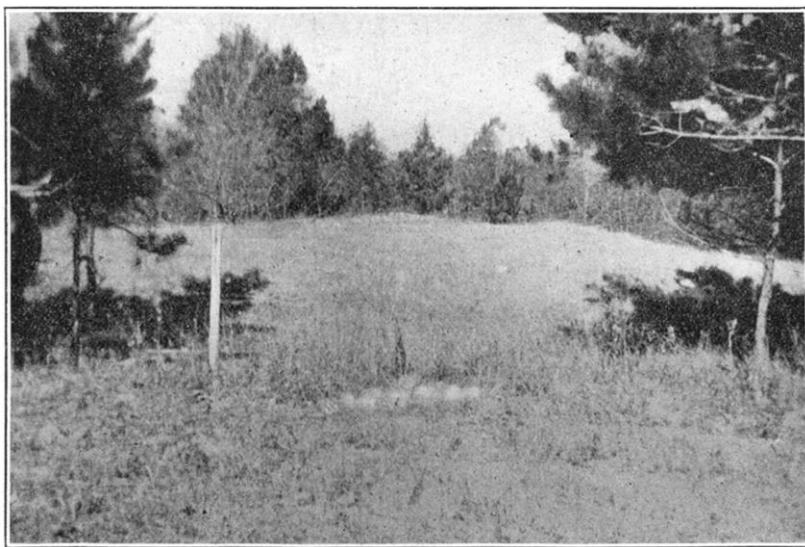


FIG. 37. — Wacoochee Creek mound, Lee county, Alabama.

was built largely of marl, some of the stones weighing two hundred pounds or more, similar to those in the shoals of the river about 75 yards away, from which these doubtless were dragged.

The mound proper is now practically destroyed, a party of

"hidden-treasure" hunters having opened it several years ago; and as the river during each freshet season overflows the cemetery, washing in great quantities of sand, it is now in some places two or three feet beneath the present surface.

No objects have been recovered from the mound itself, but from the bank of a large slough bordering the cemetery several fine earthenware pots and one large pipe have been taken.

Dr Lupton, of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama, visited this site about the year 1882 and obtained some objects, including a fine pipe.

While potsherds and other debris are met with here, no flint chips are seen. Numerous small stone-heaps have been found scattered over the cemetery where it is not too deeply covered with sand, and throughout the wooded tract north of the mound for a distance of 150 yards. The writer has opened numbers of these cairns, in some cases using a rod to the depth of two and a half to three feet, but nothing was found except stones that had been exposed to fire, some charcoal, and occasional fragments of charred bones which are probably not human. Some very large stone beads have been taken from the cemetery, but no shell objects have been seen.

On an island opposite the mouth of Soap creek, and on the river bank about two miles below, are evidences of former aboriginal occupancy, among the objects found being pots, mortars, and disks, mostly crude in form and execution, and many flint and quartz chips. The cemetery referred to was probably used by the inhabitants of the towns situated below.

THE ABERCROMBIE SITE

On the Fitzgerald plantation, at Abercrombie's Landing, in Russell county, Alabama, eight miles and a half below Columbus, Georgia, is a mound 75 feet in diameter and 15 feet high. It is 50 yards from the bank of the river and is surrounded by a cemetery. Situated as it is on a long bend of the river and commanding a fine view both up and down stream, it evidently served as an observation as well as a domiciliary site (fig. 38).

Evidences of aboriginal occupancy are more pronounced here than at any other point in the Chattahoochee valley; indeed, hav-

ing been under cultivation for a number of years, the cemetery is covered with debris. Mr Clarence B. Moore says that the debris from aboriginal occupancy was more thickly scattered here than at any other point he had ever visited.¹

Much of this debris consists of beautiful shell-tempered pottery fragments. Either the site was occupied for a long period or great numbers of vessels were buried here, though with the exception of



FIG. 38. — Fitzgerald mound, Abercrombie Landing, Russell county, Alabama, 1905.

three small gray shell-tempered pots (fig. 39) and a large black one in the writer's collection, no whole vessels have been unearthed.

Both flexed and extended burials are encountered, and as cultivation extends deeper and deeper with each succeeding year, numbers of objects are continually thrown out, such as stone and pottery disks, hammers, celts, paint-pots, and ornaments of both stone and shell; in fact, much attention seems to have been given by the inhabitants to ornamentation, as with nearly every burial uncovered

¹ Mounds of the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers, *Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila.*, XIII, 449.

are found beads, gorgets, and other objects of adornment. The gorgets are chiefly of shell, and show no unusual characteristics, though one in the writer's collection (fig. 40) has three distinct

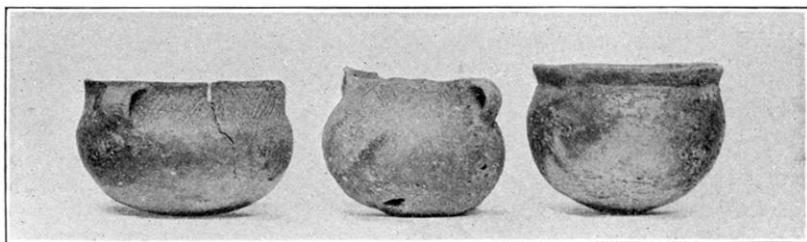


FIG. 39. — Pottery from the Fitzgerald mound, 1906.

pairs of broken-out suspension holes. In the collection also are a few small ornamented beads.

Although at a distance exceeding 300 miles from the coast,

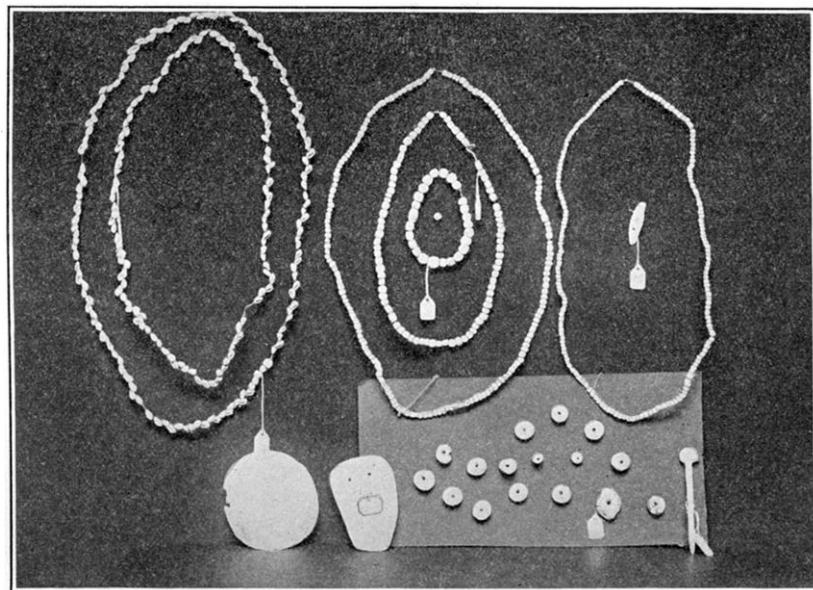


FIG. 40. — Beads, gorgets, etc., from the Fitzgerald mound, 1905-1906.

numbers of beads from the Abercrombie site consist of small pierced sea-shells (*Marginella apicena*¹), as shown in figure 40.

¹ Clarence B. Moore, *Mounds of Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers*, p. 450.

The shell used in tempering the earthenware is that of the common river mussel.

Gorgetts and beads of stone are occasionally met, and in the

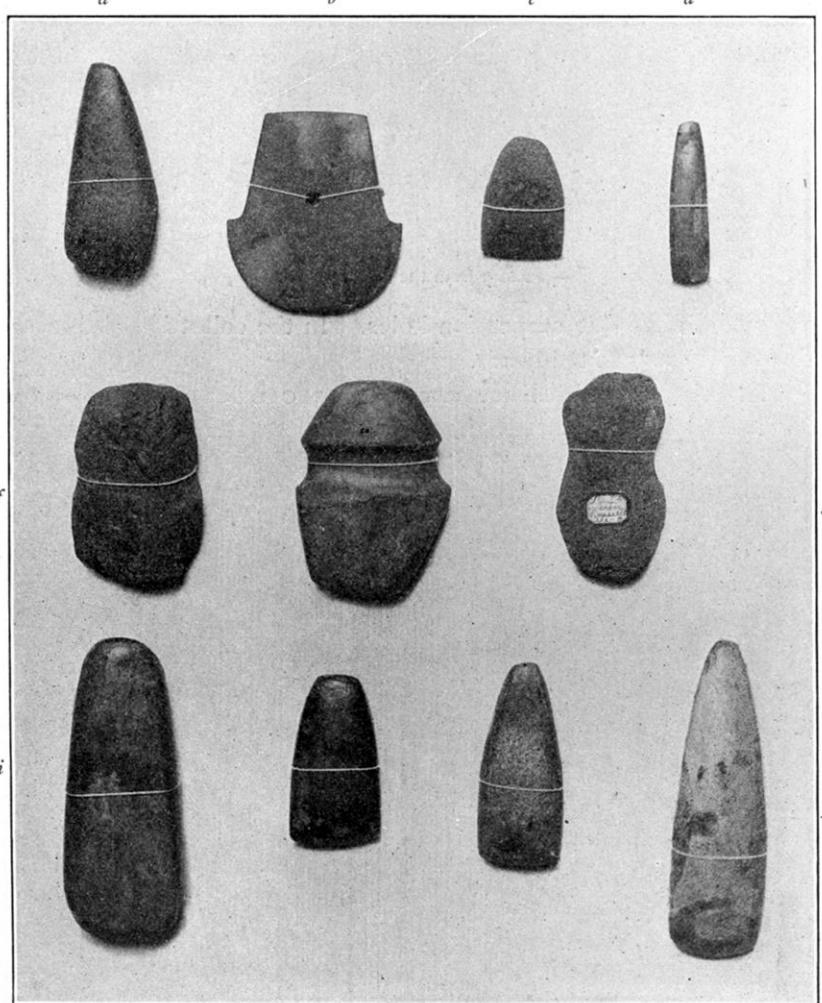


FIG. 41. — Stone objects from the Fitzgerald mound, Russell county, Alabama, 1905-1908.

collection of the late George B. McKnight, of Columbus, Georgia, now owned by Dr H. M. Whelpley of St Louis, are some white

and black striped stone beads from here, some measuring nearly half an inch in diameter, and more than a hundred of them having been found with one burial.

Pierced triangular and oval gorgets have been found. One of the latter in the writer's collection shows nearly an inch of core (fig. 43, center), indicating that the boring had been done with a reed.

Numbers of paint-pots have been recovered from the Aber-



FIG. 42. — "Hoe-shaped implement," Fitzgerald mound, 1905.

crombie site. Many fine celts and chisels have been found also, but with the exception of the three grooved axes in the collection of the writer, no implements of this kind are known to have been found elsewhere in this locality. The fine specimen shown in figure 41, *f*, was unearthed here in 1906. While it is of the prevailing color and possesses the general characteristics of the stone objects from the Chattahoochee region, it is the only one of its kind thus far found.

In the spring of 1905 I took from a flexed burial in the Aber-

crombie cemetery a very fine "hoe-shaped implement" (fig. 42), along with five thousand shell, bone, stone, and glass beads. The glass beads, 75 or 100 in number, and blue, split in halves on exposure to the atmosphere. The hoe-shaped implement shows no evidence of usage, and is highly polished, as are most of the objects of this kind found at the Abercrombie and Kyle sites.

The collection of the writer contains several hundred finely made arrow and spear heads from this locality. In no part of the valley are found so many earthenware disks, many of which are perfectly formed from decorated potsherds.

One of the most interesting objects from the Abercrombie site is a "hammer-pipe" of white quartz, highly polished inside the bowl and around the base. The object is round, about four inches high, nicely grooved, and although perfectly hammer-shaped, it is

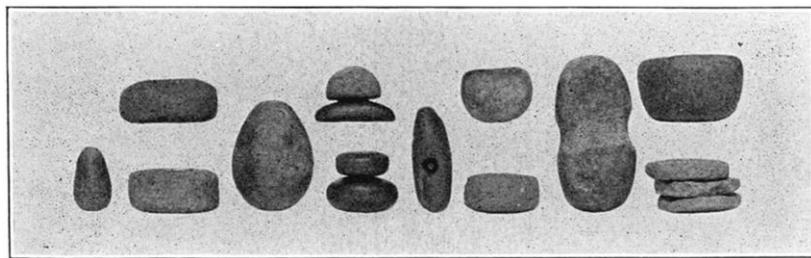


FIG. 43. — Stone objects from the Fitzgerald mound.

at the same time clearly a pipe. With this exception the site is lacking in stone pipes, and very few of pottery have been found.

Mr Clarence B. Moore believes the Abercrombie mound antedates the cemetery surrounding it,¹ and in this opinion I wholly concur.

At the flint quarry north of Columbus, about eighteen years ago Mr McKnight found a very fine "spade-shaped implement." It is about fourteen inches in length, is highly polished and black in color, with a round handle, and a flat wedge-shaped blade about two inches and a half wide at the handle end. The implement does not show evidence of use. Excepting this one, no such

¹ Mounds of the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers, p. 450.

implements are found in this section, and the writer does not recall ever having seen another from any point visited in Alabama and central Georgia. Many unfinished objects of flint are still found here.

The locality of the two mounds on the Woolfolk plantation in Chattohoochee county, Georgia, has been under cultivation for a number of years, the mounds having been practically destroyed. Some debris still remains, and a number of stone celts and disks, some beads, and a pipe or two have been obtained here. This is very probably the site of old Cussetah.

Two very handsome discoidals of about equal size have been found in this section, one from Muscogee county, two miles and a half from the river, the other (fig. 44) from the northern part of Harris county. The former is of ferruginous quartz, and is not quite so fine as the one from Harris county.

THE KYLE MOUND

On the old Woolfolk plantation in Muscogee county, Georgia, at Kyle's Bend, is the remnant of a mound back of which lies a cemetery. Situated as it was on the brink of a bluff, the river at high-water periods has eaten into the mound until only a vestige of the originally large tumulus remains. In 1888, when the river began to wash into it, the mound was about 25 feet high and more than 50 feet in diameter, with a flattened top. Now practically nothing remains.

This is one of the mounds of Georgia spoken of by Charles C. Jones¹ as observation and refuge points, but later developments have shown that it was also a burial mound, and indeed one of the richest in burials in the entire South. Situated on a sharp bend, it has been surrounded by the river at high-water periods for a number of years, and it was very probably used in later aboriginal times as a place of refuge.

Although most of the contents of this mound were washed into the river and carried away, a great many objects were procured by the late George B. McKnight, of Columbus, Georgia, and F. W. Miller, now of New Jersey. These gentlemen made a number of

¹ *Antiquities of the Southern Indians*, p. 152.

visits to the site, and their large collections consist mainly of these objects, hundreds of which the writer has studied. Many of the specimens exhibit characteristics distinct from those of other localities. The celts, axes, and other stone objects are nearly always black and highly polished, and are of superior workmanship. The



FIG. 44. — "Discoidal," Harris county, Georgia, about 1880. Diameter $5\frac{7}{16}$ inches. (In the collection of U. H. Layfield, Chipley, Ga.

earthenware varies in color and composition, and is only sparingly decorated.

The site was extremely rich in beads and other ornaments, in one instance 16,000 being found with a single burial. While the beads here, as, at the Fitzgerald mound, are mostly of shell and bone, numbers of others of white and yellow quartz, and several

dozens of amethyst have been found. The McKnight collection contains an amethyst bead nearly an inch in diameter, with a hole through the center in which one can easily insert a little finger.

Numbers of hair-pins, tubes, and gorgets of shell, and many tablets and disks of stone have been obtained here.

Among the most interesting of the objects from this site are two disk-like objects of grayish brown, untempered, hard-burned earthenware with a slightly concave surface and without ornamentation of any kind. Mr Clarence B. Moore, in a letter to the writer, expresses the belief that such objects belong to the palette class.

By far the most interesting of the mound's contents are the pottery utensils. While most of the entire vessels that have been recovered are small, a dozen or more large ones have been unearthed. One of the latter deserves special mention. It is of brown clay, burned black and not ornamented. It is not provided with legs, and judging by the small round mouth it was probably designed for carrying water. These features are characteristic of the vessels from the Kyle site, and, unlike pottery from the Abercrombie site, the vessels have no effigy handles or spouts. Long-necked water-bottles are the most common pottery forms. The ware is nearly always black, and while numbers of vessels are polished, none is shell-tempered.

Three fine "hoe-shaped implements" have been procured here,¹ but none of them shows evidence of use.

Though a few pipes have been recovered, they are not of unusual form.

Surrounding the Kyle mound is a cemetery of recent burials, in which numbers of brass rings have been found.

CONCLUSION

There seems to be no doubt that of the aboriginal sites herein mentioned the Kyle site was the last one occupied, and while contact between its inhabitants and early Europeans affected the potter's art disadvantageously, the art of implement-making does not

¹ Compare Clarence B. Moore, The So-called "Hoe-shaped" Implement, *American Anthropologist*, v, 498-502, July-September, 1903.

seem to have been similarly affected, although it is possible that these implements may antedate the pottery.

The art remains from the Kyle mound show workmanship superior to that observed in the other sites described.

The cemetery at none of the sites appears to be so old as the adjacent mound.

Hawkins¹ in 1790 reported a large conical mound near Cowetah. The Abercrombie mound is probably the one referred to, as its situation approximates the site of Upper Cowetah in Hawkins' time.

No early reference is made to a Creek town above the "falls of the Chattahoochee" that corresponds to the Wacoochee site, hence the latter was probably abandoned before the arrival of the first white settlers. The crudeness of the few objects found at Wacoochee is also suggestive of the antiquity of that site.

In all likelihood the Wacoochee mound was the first of the several sites to be occupied, and probably the mound at Abercrombie was constructed at about the same time; next apparently followed the occupancy of the Woolfolk mound and the use of the Abercrombie cemetery; then the erection of the Kyle mound, and, finally, the use of the cemetery near that site.

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

¹ Sketch of Creek Country, 58, 1843.